

UPF Czech & UPF Slovak chapters joint World Interfaith Harmony Week webinar

Juraj Lajda
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Prague, Czech Republic -- For World Interfaith Harmony Week 2021, the Czech and Slovak chapters of UPF held a webinar together.

Around 50 participants joined the webinar on February 11, 2021. The program, which was held in the Czech and Slovak languages, also was broadcast on Facebook.

Four prominent speakers offered their views on the topic "Building Bridges across Borders," which is the theme of this year's World Interfaith Harmony Week:

Rabbi Michail Kapustin, the main rabbi from the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Slovak Republic

Dr. Vladimír Sáňka, the chairman of the Muslim community in Prague

Rev. Mikuláš Vymětal, an Evangelical pastor from the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren

Miloš Klas, the president of Universal Peace Federation in Slovakia

The conference was moderated by Dr. Juraj Lajda, president of UPF in the Czech Republic. In his opening speech he reminded the audience that any attempt at rapprochement among religions is very important, especially in the times of crises when we should maintain our faith and hope. Building bridges across borders requires mutual respect and cooperation among religions and faith-based organizations, he said. Searching for peace is the common desire of all people and the prerequisite for future development.

The moderator mentioned the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, which was signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad el-Tayeb on February 4, 2019.

He also said that as early as 2000, UPF co-founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon proposed that an interreligious council should be established within the existing structure of the United Nations.

Dialogue is needed, Dr. Lajda concluded -- within religions, between religions, and between religions and secular society.

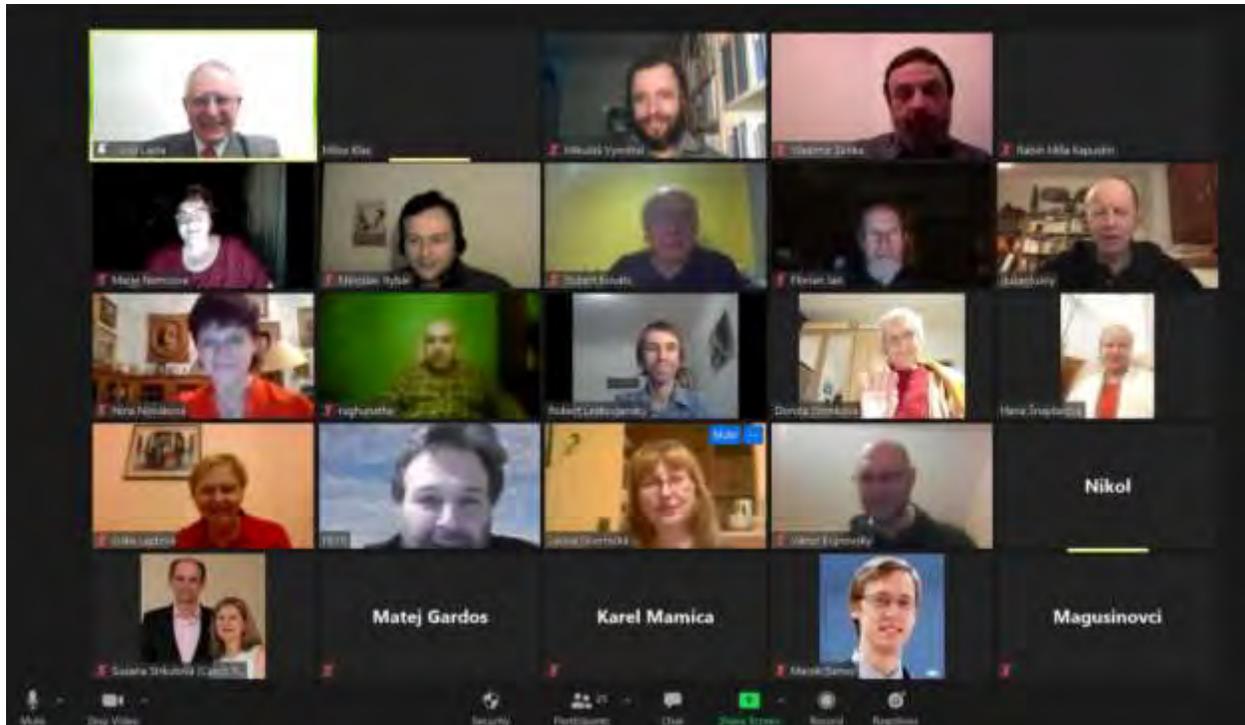
Rabbi Michail Kapustin said that we need to build bridges. Dialogue can only enrich us. The world has become a global village, and we need to develop things that can connect us. We should be open to learn from others and from nature.

The biggest obstacle to dialogue, according to the rabbi, is fear. People fear to lose something, and it is difficult to have a dialogue if one party is afraid of losing something. The purpose of interreligious dialogue should be not to try to change others but to try to change ourselves first. Rabbi Kapustin

concluded that he would like to change himself to become a better person.

Dr. Vladimír Sáňka said that no society is homogeneous. We should not support animosity in the relationships among people. The Quran says that a loving word is more than an alms followed by an evil deed. We should have respect for other people.

Extremists unfortunately exist in Islam, as in other religions, but they form a marginal group and do not understand the meaning of the Quran, Dr. Sáňka said. The Quran should be explained only by relevant scholars who understand the true meaning and context of each verse, he said. Islam has existed for 1,400 years, and we cannot judge it according to the developments of the last 20 years.



Rev. Mikuláš Vymětal explained that building bridges means to connect people, not to form alliances one against the other. Everybody thinks about God in a different way, but we have human ethics. The Swiss theologian Hans Küng has spoken about the world ethos. Rev. Vymětal called the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together an important step in interreligious dialogue. He concluded his talk with a verse from the Bible (2 Corinthians 13:11): "Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."

Miloš Klas mentioned that we are children of one God. The UPF co-founders, Rev. and Mrs. Moon, consider interreligious dialogue to be an essential goal of UPF. Without dialogue, no unity is possible. According to Hans Küng, without peace among religions, peace in the world is not possible. People may have some faith but do not know about the faith of others. Dialogue can bridge this gap and should be conducted on many levels. People in each religion should live according to their faith and try to become better people. Then dialogue, cooperation and finally reconciliation will be possible.

All the panelists expressed their appreciation for the online conference, and there were many positive responses from the audience.